

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #0420 0402238
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 092238Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6944
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8635
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1629
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 6972
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ FEB PANAMA 2987
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 7679

UNCLAS BOGOTA 000420

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: SENV ECON CO

SUBJECT: SMELL THE ROSES: CLEANER DIESEL IMPROVES AIR
QUALITY IN BOGOTA

¶11. SUMMARY. Due to tighter Ministry of Environment (MOE) regulations and clean diesel measures taken by state oil company Ecopetrol, Bogota's air quality -- historically among the poorest in Latin America -- is the best that it has been in the last twelve years. Both the MOE and Ecopetrol publicly reiterate that in 2009 they will take further steps to improve air quality, with Ecopetrol planning to invest USD 600 million over four years to increase Colombia's capacity to produce clean diesel locally. END SUMMARY.

Ecopetrol Dramatically Reduces Diesel Sulfur Levels

¶12. Bogota's air quality is among the poorest in Latin America. One Colombian researcher recently ranked it the third most polluted city behind only Mexico and Santiago. To improve the air quality and the health of its inhabitants, in April 2006 the MOE issued a resolution to reduce sulfur levels in Colombian diesel by 90 percent by 2010. (NOTE: Small particles, such as sulfur, emitted via diesel account for 65 percent of Bogota's pollution. END NOTE.) Ecopetrol publicly committed itself to support MOE's objective, reducing sulfur levels by 75 percent, making Bogota's air quality the best it has been in the last twelve years. Isabel Cristina Gaitain, Ecopetrol Fuel Accounts Executive, told us it is in Ecopetrol's interest to invest in clean technology, despite initial high costs of diesel quality improvements.

Health Concerns, The Impetus For Change

¶13. According to Colombia's Environmental Information System (IBOCA), Bogota annually emits 50,000 tons of atmospheric emissions (carbon, nitrogen and sulfur oxides), principally from Bogota's public transportation system. In 2001 the IBOCA index determined that small PM10 particles such as sulfur, which are able to reach the lower regions of the respiratory tract, accounted for 65 percent of all Bogota contaminants and caused a health risk for Bogota inhabitants.

These health concerns, and the sulfur originating from diesel, helped produce MOE's commitment to implementing mechanisms to improve diesel and air quality.

Further Improvements On The Horizon

¶14. In July 2008 the GOC transformed the non-binding resolution on diesel reductions into law. The government also reduced the hours that Bogota inhabitants can utilize their private vehicles, as well as the hours that public vehicles hours can operate. Gaitain also told us that Ecopetrol will continue to improve its diesel quality, investing USD 600 million within the next four years to increase Colombia's capacity to produce clean diesel locally,

in an effort to reduce its dependency on clean diesel imports.

Comment: Emissions Still High, But Positive Steps So Far

15. Commitment to improved air quality is a relatively new and welcome development for Bogota. The quality of Ecopetrol's diesel, and indifference among the body politic, contributed to the city's infamous record on particulate pollution. For now Bogota inhabitants can appreciate an air quality that is better than it has been in over a decade, but to make lasting improvements, Ecopetrol must follow through on its increased clean technology investment program.

BROWNFIELD